

Asexuality and Erotic Biopolitics

Nathan Snaza

This essay argues that conceptualizing asexuality as a queer orientation to sexuality instead of a sexual orientation enables a way of thinking about asexuality as a political swerve away from dominant modes of biopolitics toward an uneven field of affective erotics. The first section turns to Eve Sedgwick's famous reading of Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle" to lay out how compulsory sexuality has dominated queer reading practice and sketch the problems of relationality and kinship that are foreclosed by such readings. The second section takes up the politics of orientation, primarily drawing on Sara Ahmed's work, before generalizing in the fourth section to an account of the biocultural becoming of all creatures. Asexuality, on this reading, comes to be a biocultural phenomenon that emerges from complex relations among a biological entity and a more-than-human milieu. The third section offers a schematic overview of colonial biopolitics as, to use Sylvia Wynter's words, the overrepresentation of the human by Man, which requires persons to have a sexuality. The final section returns to kinship, arguing that asexuality should be constellated with a range of queer and decolonial modes of performing the human that are inseparable from more-than-human erotic relations.

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I could partly account for my own asexuality by referring to tests documenting my very low testosterone levels for a person whose sex assigned at birth was male, or by confessing to a history of failed sexual encounters that constitute, more or less, my entire experience as a sexually active person. But attempts to biologize or narrowly historicize asexuality end up being reductive and ultimately function within modes of biopolitical governance via sexuality that Foucault (1978) outlined in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality*: "the medicine of sex" (54) and the modulations of confession that constitute the "incitement to discourse" (18–24). I have no interest in downplaying hormonal and chemical

constraints on my experience, and I acknowledge that my experiences moving through physical and institutional environments have stuck to me (as Sara Ahmed would say [2015, 8]), but what I would like to dwell with in this essay is how coming to a sense of *myself* as asexual is inseparable from years of reading Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and the swirl of erotic encounters that constitute every situation of my reading.

In the first two sections, I offer my reading of Sedgwick and the situations in which I read her—especially “The Beast in the Closet” (1990b), an essay on Henry James’s “The Beast in the Jungle,” which can feel paradigmatic of queer reading as such—in order to map how my discomfort with her reading pulls me toward an asexual interpretation of James’s story that invites much larger questions about biopolitics, coloniality, affect, orientation, and kinship. Attuning to how orientations are shaped by more-than-human scenes of haptic, erotic encounters (that are colonially organized), I summon Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* to argue that asexuality is an orientation *toward* sexuality within a wider field of the situation, where erotic biopolitics link humans and non-humans in ways that cannot be conceptualized within liberal humanist frames. Section three elaborates these questions around the concept of *erotic biopolitics*, reading Sylvia Wynter’s genealogy of colonial humanism in relation to Audre Lorde’s concept of the erotic. The essay’s final section constellates asexuality as an orientation toward sexuality with queer and decolonial biopolitical projects of worldmaking, in which the production of kin relations not oriented around *sexuality* as a mode of governance plays a constitutive role.

Reading Sedgwick in the Biocultural Situation

Across the last two decades, as I read and taught Sedgwick’s “The Beast in the Closet,” I was periodically in therapy to think through my failures to be properly sexual and the difficulties that said failure introduced into my emotional, relational, and professional experience.¹ At no point did any therapist—the last of whom I saw in 2009—suggest *asexuality* as a way of conceptualizing myself. It was during this period that I read Sedgwick most often, and also during which my discomfort with her final reading of James Marcher’s “secret” in “The Beast in the Jungle” grew. Only when I finally encountered the work of the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN)—however skeptical I am of it when I think about it in the framework of erotic biopolitics I sketch below—did a word emerge around which I could crystallize a particular affective experience. While *asexuality* allows me to talk about my interests, desires, and habits with others in a way that does not pathologize my embodied movement through the world, Audre Lorde’s concept of *erotics* allows me to claim that asexuality is not a *lack* of something others supposedly *have* (the *a-* is what linguists call the alpha privative), or even an attribute of my self. It is rather a specifically *erotic* relationality that orients me in a world directly implicated in the entire

modern history of coloniality and the ways that coloniality has shaped the norms through which assemblages “discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (Weheliye 2014, 3). Building from an account of Sedgwick’s reading and my torqueing away from it, I argue that asexuality is better conceived as an orientation toward—as opposed to a sexual orientation that is legible *within*—the domain of sexuality.

Asexuality has become, in recent years, a reasonably well-known identification, thanks in no small part to AVEN’s work and to a proliferation of Tumblr sites that explore it as a distinct identity (which blooms into many subidentities) and construct an archive of asexual characters in literary, filmic, and television culture. As the concept of asexuality has attained greater visibility, there has emerged a “significant debate over whether or not asexuality is queer” (Yergeau 2018, 189). As Ela Przybylo notes in a review of the first edited anthology of academic writing on asexuality, “Asexuality studies . . . trouble, as have trans* studies, the very field of queer and sexuality scholarship by focusing attention on a previously unattended-to identity and mode of inquiry” (2016, 655). Although AVEN’s mission is precisely to propose asexuality as a sexual orientation—a conception that appears in the work of contributors to KJ Cerankowski and Megan Milks’s *Asexualities: Feminist and Queer Perspectives* collection and in Przybylo’s field-defining work—I argue that while there may be important pragmatic reasons for individuals to claim asexuality as a sexual orientation, this move disenables the most generative possibilities that asexuality offers as a modality of living that “baffles, dodges, and unthreads the hegemony of hetero- and homosexuality” (Kahan 2013, 145).²

In “Queer and Now,” Sedgwick writes that “there are important senses in which ‘queer’ can signify only when attached to the first person . . . what it takes—all it takes—to make the description ‘queer’ a true one is the impulsion to use it in the first person” (1993, 9). In this sense, the desire of asexual subjects, like myself, to use *queer* as a predicate settles the question. But this feels insufficient to me, at least without significant theoretical elaboration. I want to follow Remi Yergeau, who alludes to precisely this statement of Sedgwick’s before writing, “While I defer to individuals making their own decisions around personal identification, I am here advocating that we regard asexuality queerly because asexuality regards both desire and identity as fluctuating and transient. Queering is a motioning toward, a fisted gesture, an always-becoming” (Yergeau 2018, 189). Shifting Yergeau’s formulation slightly, I would suggest that asexuality is queer on the condition that we understand it not as a queer sexual orientation but rather as a queer orientation to sexuality.

I cannot account for my own attachments to *asexuality* without thinking of it as an irreducibly biocultural phenomenon that is situationally intra-active.³ It is neither *natural* nor *cultural*, neither *choice* nor *instinctual*. Whereas this is true of asexuality, I argue—building on work by Sylvia Wynter and Samantha Frost—that life is constitutively biocultural. While I’m drawn toward all the work

happening around queer nonhuman sexuality (Roughgarden, 2013), I'm also keenly aware of how some of the work taking up *queer nature* ends up factoring out the irreducible agonism that constitutes the social (Rosenberg, 2014). To say that everything is biocultural is an ontological axiom that might give rise to specific political struggles—queer politics, or decolonization—that may be better understood in biocultural terms than in traditionally humanist frames.⁴ It is to situate politics in a field that cannot be limited to the actions of agencies known by consciousnesses with *intentions*. Whatever else I am, and whatever my capacities for agency and autopoesis, I am an effect of systems—energetic, chemical, atmospheric, climatological, economic, political—that swirl around and inside of me, and without which I could in no way persist and grow, let alone desire, struggle, or speculate (Grosz 2004). Asexuality is not locatable in a self per se; it is part of the ongoing becoming of the world.⁵ To put it this way is to figure asexuality as part of what Angela Willey calls *biopossibility*, which “opens up space for thinking natureculturally not only about friendship, community, and/or our coevolution with nonhuman animals but also human relationships to ‘things’—both abstract and material” (2016, 138). Asexuality appeals to me precisely as one eddy in a swirl of creative biocultural challenges to the norms of humanness articulated in relation to what Wynter calls *Man*: the specific, imperialist, heterosexist modality of performing the human that has increasingly ordered all social formations within colonial modernity.

Refusing to conflate *Man* and the human, Wynter (1999; 2003) argues that the human is a hybrid biological/cultural entity or system, one that is constantly becoming in relation to a material environment, which already involves many scales—from the energetic swirl of protons, neutrons, and electrons, to the *individual* level of an organism's *environment*, to the global territorializations of transnational colonialism, and in relation to socioigenic scripts that *run* the cybernetic system of the person. Rather than natural/cultural with a slash, I tend to prefer Samantha Frost's *biocultural*: “All creatures are biocultural in the sense that they develop, grow, persist, and die in an environment or habitat that is the condition for their development, growth, persistence, and death” (2016, 4). Everything I touch and am touched by, including Sedgwick's writings, constitute part of this environment, or what I prefer to call the *situation*. As I argue elsewhere (Snaza 2019), situations are contact zones among many different kinds of entities, most of which are not human, that form the affective fields from which subjects emerge. Subjects (with identities) are not necessarily conscious of being suspended in and affected by ever-shifting situations, in part because assemblages that generate *Man* as the overrepresentation of the human prime us to not attend to the affective participation of nonhumans and their animacies, even as our corporeal orientation in the world is modulated in and by this more-than-human situation.⁶

Each time I pick up my copy of Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990a), I recall—in ways that far outstrip my conscious awareness—particular spaces

(apartments, busses, cafés, classrooms, airplanes) in which I spent time with Sedgwick's words. Each space had a particular light, temperature, and sonic atmosphere. I was often alone, or with cats, but I also read Sedgwick with teachers and with students. I was on furniture, more and less comfortable, and I was often affected by consumption of coffee or herbal teas that modulate mood. As part of my body's psychosomatic apparatus was consciously focused on making sense of Sedgwick's words, my body's entire perceptual capacity was always being affected by this surrounding. My attachments to Sedgwick's writings have shifted across time, and not merely in the sense of becoming better or more disciplined as I moved from undergraduate to graduate study, and then to a faculty position. Those shifts were intra-active with new material conditions afforded by stipends, grants, and increased wages that attend (some) movement through universities in the United States.⁷ There are so many agencies at work here, not merely Sedgwick's (as writer) and mine (as reader): the texture of stock on the cover of my copy of *Epistemology of the Closet* as my thumbs glide across it, the glow of a lamp on a coffee shop table, the sounds of the city coming through the window of a bus. The pleasures I take in reading Sedgwick are, in part, the pleasures I have learned to associate with reading as an erotic act.⁸

Whereas some scholars use sexual and erotic as proximal or synonymous, I am most drawn toward accounts that treat the erotic "in its broadest sense, and not simply sexually, as respectful relationship and care for self and others [who may not be human], that is, as a socially significant practice of love that is . . . world-making" (Pérez 2019, xviii). In "Uses of the Erotic," Lorde differentiates the erotic from the pornographic, wherein the latter is "the suppression of true feeling" ([1978] 1984, 54). The possibilities of erotics—"the erotic is not a question only of what we can do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing" (54)—are, in a "male world" (53), always constrained and distorted. The erotic includes those experiences that are describable as sexual, but extends much further to include the entire field of haptics, a field that shimmers with joy, connecting humans and nonhumans (like a bookcase or margarine [57]).⁹ The erotic is a question, which means that it is a site of situational struggle over joy. In the situation—the entire field of affective modulation, most of which is far outside of anything humans are conscious of—events take shape, or do not, or not quite. Erotic biopolitics is what I would call the haptic, affective struggle over those conditions of emergence.

Situations are the field of the erotic: they are scenes in which entities come into contact and pleasures (and other affects) are generated. I can recall moments that feel like events—where I became consciously aware of how my interpretation of Sedgwick was changing, or how I was changing through engagements with her writing. But every event emerges from a situation: "a state of things in which something that will perhaps matter is unfolding amid the usual activity of life" (Berlant 2011, 5). There is something perceptible, but not really consciously perceived—a background hum, as Berlant calls it in her

reading of a John Ashbery poem, that surrounds a subject and courses through it. Because the meaning generated when I read is always affected by this wider, more-than-human milieu (what Frost calls the “environment or habitat”), all knowledge is *situated* and situational, in the sense that meaning-generating agency extends far beyond the human knower.¹⁰

Ela Przybylo and Danielle Cooper note that AVEN “frequently . . . rehearses a biologically bound definition of asexuality” (2014, 301). Reading posts on the AVEN website, they find a “specious” repetition compulsion that figures “celibacy as choice and asexuality as nonchoice” (301). Refusing to make a binary decision about the origin of asexuality, Przybylo and Cooper theorize *asexual resonances*: “traces, touches, instances” that allow “us to search for asexuality in unexpected places” (298). Becoming attuned to such resonances, they imagine “a queerly asexual reading strategy” (298) that moves past the question of stable asexual identities (Was Agnes Martin? What about someone like Edward Gorey, etc.) to tracking the more diffuse appearance of asexual resonances that can constitute a specific archive. This move undoubtedly positions their project in relation to a field-imaginary in queer studies that takes *the archive* as one of its most abiding attachments, and I agree that assembling such an archive will be necessary for asexual politics to thrive in its modality as a sexual orientation.¹¹ My own interest in asexuality departs from this, even if I would similarly designate my project as the elaboration of a specific manner or mode of reading, one oriented around an erotic biopolitics of the situation.

Compulsory Sexuality and the Orientations of Reading

In *Celibacies*, Benjamin Kahan notes that Sedgwick’s reading practice in “The Beast in the Closet” has become one of the most ubiquitous practices of queer reading (2013). Kahan pressures this queer hermeneutic slippage from “the ‘absence’ of sex” to “sign[s] of homosexuality” (3), arguing that “while the epistemology of the closet is an epistemology of the open secret, celibacy offers an epistemology of the empty secret” (3). I strongly agree with Kahan’s claim here, but because he crafts “a celibate reading practice” (27) by “historiciz[ing] celibacy as a sexuality” (1), his project operates in a frame that does not directly call compulsory sexuality into question. Elizabeth Hannah Hanson does this in an explicitly asexual reading of James’s story in which she engages with Sedgwick, whom she sees as enacting an “asexual erasure” predicated on not acknowledging a compulsory sexuality undergirding compulsory heterosexuality (2014, 360). Hanson’s essay is excellent, and I would share many of her interpretive moves, but her focus is on how asexuality represents a *threat* to narrative structure as such, which critics frequently conflate with sexual desire (348). Hanson thus briefly notes some of the main problems I will draw out here, but does not dwell on them or theorize their biopolitical ramifications.

James's story "The Beast in the Jungle" follows a man, James Marcher, who has a very long relationship, perhaps even a kind of intimacy, with a woman, May Bartram. Their relations are structured by a "secret," one that is consistently marked as a secret in the story without its content being named in any direct manner (James 1998). Indeed, it is to the profusion of indirect qualifications of this secret that Sedgwick directs her incredible critical acumen. These oblique references lead Sedgwick to a resonance between the secret and various phrases circulating around homosexuality—especially "the love that dare not speak its name"—and they allow her to make a case that the specific "content" of Marcher's secret is "homosexual" (Sedgwick 1990b, 203). This reading hinges, in effect, on two critical moves. The first, already hinted at, involves attention to the persistent use of "periphrasis and preterition" (203): an entire network of linguistic sleights of hand are emitted by this secret, as if from a black hole's event horizon. Secondly, Sedgwick attends carefully to a scene at the end of the story when the narrator tracks Marcher at Bartram's grave watching another man. She writes, "What is strikingly open in the ending of 'The Beast in the Jungle' is how central to that process is man's desire for man—and the denial of that desire" (211).

In the context of *Epistemology of the Closet*, this move is highly motivated. It confirms Sedgwick's central claim that male homosexual panic is a universalizing force structuring virtually the entirety of the social in the wake of the appearance, toward the end of the nineteenth century, of the hetero-/homo- binary. Among other things, Sedgwick's reading troubles the ease with which James's critics have taken Marcher's secret to be "necessarily, specifically heterosexual" (Sedgwick 1990b, 202): at the end of the story, these critics draw from the moral that Marcher "*should have desired May Bartram*" (198). The unthinking way in which such critics draw their power from compulsory heterosexuality comes into full crisis in Sedgwick's reading. Sedgwick is attentive to how such compulsory heterosexuality among men—which is tied, as she notes, to the production not just of masculinity but even humanity itself (188)—constitutes a field of violence against women (critics, presumably here including Sedgwick, assert that Bartram "has died from [Marcher's] obtuseness" about his own desires [195]). And Sedgwick is very clear that Marcher "is not a homosexual man" (205), even if for her his secret is precisely the structure of a kind of paranoia attending homosexual panic and its epistemological double binds.

Positioning her reading against the "conventional view of the story," Sedgwick writes the following:

I hypothesize that what May Bartram would have liked for Marcher, the narrative she wished to nurture for him, would have been a progress from the vexed and gaping self-ignorance around his homosexual possibilities to a self-knowledge of them that would have freed him to find and enjoy a sexuality of whatever sort emerged (207).

Although this hypothesis follows quite logically and affectively from Sedgwick's reading, my discomfort emerges precisely from the presupposition here that Marcher's happiness—and Bartram's in relation—would follow on Marcher being able to have or express "a sexuality of whatever sort." Earlier in the essay, Sedgwick notes, writing about a general type of bachelor character in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, that "in each story the man simply fails to desire at all" (195). From the standpoint of compulsory heterosexuality, this is indeed a failure. And while Sedgwick's reading goes very far to reveal the structure of those binds and the way they police the entire social field (across genders, sexualities, and so on), I want to ask why desire is so necessary, and specifically sexual desire. Why, I wonder, must Marcher have a sexuality at all?

In the introduction to *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick takes up how the success or value of her book might be assessed. She writes:

A real measure of the success of such an analysis would lie in its ability, in the hands of an inquirer with different needs, talents, or positionings, to clarify the distinctive kinds of resistance offered to it from different spaces on the social map, even though such a project might require revisions or rupturings of the analysis as first proffered (14).

These sentences lead me to think that the affective discomfort I experience reading this essay might be, in an important way, possible because of the way my reading practice is structured by an enduring erotic relationship with Sedgwick's work, one that highlights the different situational materialities of my "positioning" as they shape my attention.¹² In fact, my disagreement with her reading of Marcher's secret emerges from a profound agreement with other claims made in the same book, and in others. One of my favorite bullet points from *Epistemology of the Closet*'s introduction, "Axiomatic," is the first axiom, "People are different from each other." To wit: "Some people like to have a lot of sex, others little or none" (25). Or none. Why can this possibility not be available to Marcher? That is, why must Marcher be legible only within a system not just of compulsory heterosexuality, but what Becky Rosa (1994) has called compulsory sexuality?¹³

Critics, including Sedgwick, see Marcher's secret as part of a field of social violence wherein a man's "inability to desire" inflicts damage on women. Sedgwick sees this violence as a product of compulsory heterosexuality and hypothesizes that if Marcher were free to have a sexuality "of whatever kind," the social/relational violence could be suspended. Because I would argue that the real violence adheres in compulsory sexuality, let me offer a different reading of the end of James's story than the one Sedgwick hypothetically proposes. The final section of the story narrates a moment when Marcher visits Bartram's grave after traveling abroad for a time. There, he sees another man, "his neighbor at the other grave" (James 1998, 368). The end of the paragraph that begins with this phrase reads: "The stranger passed, but the raw glare of his grief remained, making our friend wonder in pity what wrong,

what wound it expressed, what injury not to be healed. What had the man *had*, to make him by the loss of it so bleed and yet live?" (369). In a story where so much of Marcher and Bartram's discussion of "the great vagueness" (357) is structured by how each of them separately and as a pair are perceived by others, what strikes me most here is Marcher's rather simple wish to be able to grieve like this other man in a way that would be socially legible.¹⁴ This is one way to read the line, referring to Marcher and Bartram, that reads "the real form it should have taken on the basis that stood out large was the form of their marrying. But the devil in this was that the very basis itself put marrying out of the question" (349). In other words, marriage—a social institution recognizing a bond—would have been a "form" that offered the two something legible because, as Hanson notes, "friendship . . . proves insufficient to give his mourning the proper gravity" (2014, 360). I cannot help but think here of Przybylo's claim that "asexuality manifests itself in the premium I place on friendships, broadly understood" (Przybylo and Cooper 2014, 297). Can we imagine forms of relationality that allow grief for friends who fall outside of the protected and socially sanctioned positions of a sexually oriented kinship structure? Judith Butler asks three crucial questions—Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And what *makes for a grievable life* (2004b, 20)—that underscore the directly biopolitical implications of this inquiry. For if asexuality appears precisely in the space of indeterminacy with respect to the human and its (ahuman, nonhuman, less-than-human) constitutive outsides, then the question of which lives we are allowed to grieve positions us squarely at the affective center of biopolitics. Rethinking kinship assemblages in a way that does not require sexuality to structure all relations would open the possibility that nonsexual relations can be sustained and can sustain us. The lack of sexuality in a long-standing intimacy would not be an irreparable harm that leads to what Lauren Berlant might call Bartram's "slow death" (2011), but a manner of being oriented toward one another that could be affirmed.

In calling asexuality a queer orientation (but not a sexual orientation), I am drawing on Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology*, which underscores what we might call the intra-active relations of bodies and spaces: "The 'here' of bodily dwelling is thus what takes the body outside of itself, as it is affected and shaped by its surroundings" (2006, 8–9). Orientation is thus a way of thinking through how bodies move through spaces (physical, social, institutional, psychic, etc.); how spaces shape bodies through repetition and the accumulations of affects that "stick" to bodies; and how bodies are differentially oriented in space in ways that make some movements more or less within or out of reach, in ways that have everything to do with coloniality, race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, geography, literacies, and so on.¹⁵ Such a conception allows Ahmed to theorize the power relations—often operating at the level of affect and attention—that orient bodies in relation to sexuality: "What intrigues me here is not so much how sex, gender, and sexual orientation can 'get out of line,' which they certainly

can and do ‘do,’ but how they are kept in line, often through force, such that any nonalignment produces a queer effect” (83).

Ahmed’s opening exemplum for tracking this politics of orientation is her table: “This book is written on different tables, which orient me in different ways or which come to ‘matter’ as effects of different orientations” (11). Each table is individuated: it has a shape, a texture, a smell, a diffuse history of human and nonhuman agencies and practices; Ahmed insists that “what is behind the table is what must have already taken place for the table to arrive” (37). The writer and the table come into (erotic) contact, then, only by emerging from and enduring within vast and complex relations of touch (a root touches soil, a saw touches a tree, sandpaper touches roughly hewn lumber, chemical stain touches untreated wood, someone has moved *this* table into *this* room), and what is true of the table is true of every object in the situation.¹⁶ This entire scene of friction, contact, collision, and sedimented touch constitutes the specific materiality of an orienting environment that shapes a body over time, in ways that are almost impossible to think outside of coloniality, whiteness, heteropatriarchy, and capitalist extraction. Some bodies are oriented to be able to “reach” more, and “what is other than me is also what allows me to extend the reach of my body” (Ahmed, 115). Ahmed’s politics of orientation is directly erotic (she summons Lorde early in the argument), and it unquestionably extends erotics beyond sexuality and the human, while still insisting on the highly differentiated ways that intrahuman politics shape the conditions of possibility (or arrival) for erotic encounters.¹⁷

“The Beast in the Jungle” is a narrative about conversations, and the story depicts the situations in which Marcher and Bartram meet to talk, mostly at the luxurious Weatherend house (where the first two sections are largely set), and at the much more modest house Bartram buys in London with some inheritance. Weatherend is described only a few sentences into the story: it had “all the fine things, intrinsic features, pictures, heirlooms, treasures of all the arts” (James 1998, 341). Inside the house, just before Marcher and Bartram renew their acquaintance after ten years (since a meeting “that tremendously hot day when we went to Sorrento” [344]), they find themselves “alone in one of the rooms [. . .] and the charm of [the room] was that even before they had spoken they had practically arranged with each other to stay behind for talk. The charm was in other things too,” including the view of the autumn day through the window, and the way the “red light” “played over old wainscots, old tapestry, old gold, old color” (342). The erotic experiences of being in *those* spaces would seem to constitute the main pleasures of their relationship: that is, the story is not really about the *secret* so much as *materially situated* conversations about the secret. For Marcher and Bartram, those pleasures are precisely those of imperialist whiteness.¹⁸ Ahmed insists that “colonialism makes the world ‘white,’ which is of course a world ‘ready’ for certain kinds of bodies, as a world that puts certain objects within their reach” (2006, 111). The world is *within*

reach to Marcher especially, but also to Bartram, and so their asexual orientation has to be understood as the most privileged possible modality.

I want to pick up on an aside in Sedgwick's essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading" in *Touching Feeling* (2003), which has become a lightning rod in what are often called "the method wars" in contemporary criticism that the structure of paranoid reading—driven by a desire to reveal and expose—is one she "certainly recognize[s] . . . as characterizing a fair amount of [her] own writing" (144).¹⁹ I want to ask if at this crucial moment of "The Beast in the Closet," Sedgwick gives in to a specifically paranoid reading practice that is subtended by compulsory sexuality. And I wonder what happens to queer reading if instead of being oriented toward texts in such a way that sexuality has to be found even—or especially—in the spaces where it is manifestly *absent*, we might imagine—and even affirm—reading practices that are still entirely *queer* in their orientations without that queerness being sutured to the necessity of the sexual. If sexuality has been the great reservoir of meanings that *require interpretation*—for psychoanalysts, queer theorists, horny readers of any orientation squirreling salacious books away in corners of libraries, advertising executives, etc.—asexually oriented reading finds itself in the embarrassing position of focusing on moments where *there is nothing to interpret*. If Marcher "fails to desire," it is entirely possible that the only thing that needs to be said about that is this: he fails to desire. One can trace the consequences of this failure on his relations. One can track how he may be typical of other bachelor characters from nineteenth-century novels. But I do not think it is always the best hermeneutic to *explain* that failure to desire by shuttling it through a reading practice that takes as axiomatic that *one must (sexually) desire*. And my wager here is that giving up on this hermeneutic compulsion can let us feel the complex biopolitical questions raised by James's story about erotics, touch, and orientation.

Not One But Many: The Biopolitics of Humanism

For Sylvia Wynter (1984; 1995; 2003; Wynter and McKittrick 2015), a specific version of performing the human has become "overrepresented" as the human in the post-1492 moment we often call "modernity."²⁰ This dominant genre of being human—what Wynter calls Man—requires that to be legible as a human person one must *have* a race, a gender, and—at least after the invention of the concept of sexuality in the latter half of the nineteenth century—a sexuality.²¹ Moreover, this legibility in relation to Man functions primarily at a perceptual and affective level, which is shaped by the social circulation of narratives instantiating specific ideas of what it feels like to *human*.

As a range of thinkers have argued, what we now call the biopolitics of sexuality emerged entirely within the wake of the colonial project synecdochally indexed by the date 1492. Whereas Foucault's canonical account of biopolitics in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* does little more than gesture toward how

biopolitics and state racisms were entangled (1978, 149), critics like Wynter and Laura Ann Stoler (1995) have shifted the focus from relations within colonial metropoles toward the racial biopolitics of the colony and the plantation, and queer of color scholarship (Ferguson 2004; Holland 2012; Schuller 2018) argues that sexuality and sexual difference itself are *effects* of racial biopower. The taken-for-granted humanist assumption that human persons *have* a race, sex, gender, and sexuality—always produced through the simultaneous generation of Man’s “constitutive outsides” (Butler 1993, 8)—only makes sense within the colonialist model of human-as-Man.

Wynter’s Man/human distinction is a helpful heuristic for organizing an account of the biopolitics of humanism. First, she picks up on Frantz Fanon’s idea of “sociogeny” (1967, 11) to argue that humans are hybrid biological/cultural creatures whose very material development and autopoietic maintenance is structured by encounters with scripts or narratives that circulate and organize—or better, orient—individual biocultural creatures in relation to particular ideas about what it means to perform the human. Different social formations will have different authorizing scripts, leading to different ways of doing the human “as verb.” This is, in an important way, an ontological claim on Wynter’s part. Second, she connects this ontological account of the human as a constitutively open evolutionary/cybernetic system to an historical or genealogical argument about how the coloniality appearing in and around Europe in early modernity—which transformed theology, statecraft, educational institutions, intellectual disciplinary formations . . . really, *everything*—consolidated one specific genre of the human (Man), and requires considerable violence to “overrepresent” it as if it were the only permissible way to perform being human (Wynter 2003).

To put this as laconically as I can: performing the human under the aegis of Man requires one to *have* a sexuality, and so to not *have* one (or to *have* the wrong one) risks exposure to the dehumanizing violence that saturates and enables the social field. Alexander Weheliye, summarizing Wynter in a way that focuses on the omnipresent anti-Blackness of modern biopolitics, writes that “the sociogenic anchoring of racial difference in physiology and the banning of black subjects from the domain of the human occur in and through gender and sexuality” (2014, 42). Sexuality, then, cannot be separated from coloniality, the biopolitics of race, or struggles over the meaning of the being human. Asking if the queer has ever been human, Dana Luciano and Mel Chen reread “queer theory’s foundational texts” and find that they “interrogate, implicitly or explicitly, the nature of the ‘human’ in relation to the queer, both in their attention to how sexual norms themselves constitute and regulate hierarchies of humanness, and as they work to unsettle those norms and the default forms of humanness they uphold” (2015, 186). For Wynter, this project of unsettling the norms of humanness involves the collated and intersectional struggle for “full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves,” which would include what M. Jacqui Alexander (1997) calls “erotic autonomy

as a politics of decolonization.” What I’m calling erotic biopolitics is a way of contributing to that project by focusing on struggles in—and over—*situations*, but I worry about the atomization that creeps in when the prefix *auto-* is used, even as I share Wynter and Alexander’s commitment to nonstatist and non-Man ways of performing the human. The *auto-* rhetorically dims the affective surge of connection and collisions of the situations *from which* a semistable system can emerge. The concept of erotic biopolitics foregrounds the necessarily entangled, often violent, often joyful, and always mutually intra-active *becoming-with* of all entities (Haraway 2016, 97).

It is in relation to the norms of humanness as they shape the possibilities of living that I have sympathy for the move to see asexuality as a sexual orientation, or a part of what Foucault called the “multiplication of singular sexualities” (1978, 47). Asexuality as sexual orientation gestures toward *being included* within the dominant conception of the human, and allows people to become legible within that political horizon. And when it is positioned as a sexual orientation, it also fans into a spectrum of semidistinct asexualities including gray asexual, demisexual, and autochorisexual. A useful distinction is often made between *asexuality* (as the disinclination toward sexual encounters, feelings, desires, etc.) and being *aromantic* (disinclined toward, well, romance). People have even theorized the asexual equivalent to the crush: the squish.²² In this mode, asexuality serves as an organizing logic keyed toward representation (at, say, Pride events) and inclusion (such as the appending of A to LGBTQI). I readily acknowledge that this move makes any number of social encounters considerably easier; for instance, when I tell someone that I’m asexual, it at least offers a shorthand for orienting expectations about the ways our specific corporeal encounter may unfold, and the ways that my mode of living with others will take shape (hence the question of kinship to which I return below). Judith Butler lays out most clearly the manner in which being able to lay claim to recognized modalities of gender and sexuality “figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity” (2004a, 11).

But I think it is more interesting, politically at least, to ask about what happens if asexuality *is not* a sexual orientation, and if it refuses the codes that govern Man’s overrepresentation as the human. In Sedgwick’s terms, this involves a shift from thinking of asexuality in a minoritizing frame to a universalizing one (1990a). Asexuality would seem to sit at precisely a point of indeterminacy with respect to the biopolitics of humanism. It *can* be integrated, by positioning it as part of Foucault’s “sexual mosaic” (1978, 47), but it *can also* point toward the possibility of a different genre of performing the human, one in which *having* a sexuality—and the entire apparatus of biopolitical relations that subtend and structure *sexuality*—is not compulsory. And this in turn opens up a way to conceptualize an erotic biopolitics that functions “beyond, beneath, and beside” the biopolitics of sexuality, one that may enable different forms of decolonial and queer politics (Sedgwick 2003, 8).

Such a politics could imagine pleasures that without being sexual (or having truck with orgasms, genitals, specific emplotments in stories, etc.) are still erotic. *The erotic*, for Lorde, is a field of joy extending well beyond the sexual as a restricted realm, and the affirmation of the erotic's more diffuse possibilities constitutes a political swerve away from the patriarchal capture of joy and pleasure. For Lorde, the erotic is about *sharing* ([1978] 1984, 56), and she locates it in a list of activities that I continue to find fascinating: "dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea" (56–57). An asexually orientated reading allows us to extend this list, and affirm the possibilities for nonsexual *sharing* that resonate throughout the social (and are indeed a constitutive part of the social's asexual replication). Understanding our social practices as erotic allows for a more complex attunement to the ways that intrahuman violence attends the assemblages that generate us as subjects and modulate our movements through social, institutional, and physical space. It gives us a crucial way of thinking about the social as constitutively more-than-human, where scenes of collision among differently animated entities inform the kinds of persons we become and the pleasures we experience. Put differently, I would argue that there is a more-than-human situation from which human persons emerge, and erotics names the struggles within that sphere over collective joy. *Sexuality* is belated, and a subject with *a sexuality* is always emergent from a wider, more diffuse situation wherein erotics extend beyond a subject's cognition and include innumerable more-than-human encounters. This situation is where a great deal of violence takes place, but it is also precisely where possibilities circulate for disrupting Man. Riffing on this, Angela Willey writes, "Lorde's biopossibility of the erotic is a theory of the capacious aptitude for joy that can be realized in so many possible ways: touching, listening, thinking, talking, moving, building" (2016, 138). We might struggle for, and within, a world of queer erotics that is not entirely captured by the biopolitics of sexuality.²³

Erotics, Kinship, and the Biopolitics of Touch

Przybylo and Cooper write that "asexuality multiplies and configures relationship formations" (2014, 297). I want to take up this multiplication by theorizing asexuality as a relation to sexuality, and drawing asexuality into affiliation with other (queer, decolonial) kinship systems not wedded to nuclear families and tired oedipal scripts. Przybylo and Cooper offer their formulation of *queerly asexual reading* in the hope that "reading *queerly* can effectively mobilize asexuality toward unpredictable literary, historical, and theoretical readings" (304). Part of this practice, for them, is a shift in reading from looking for persons with asexual identities toward being "attuned . . . to asexual 'resonances'—what we understand as a certain texture, sensibility, or implication of asexuality that shifts the focuses from asexual *identities* to asexual traces, touches, instances" (304). It is not possible to say in advance what these will

look or feel like, where they will be, or to what pleasures and violences they will be attached.²⁴

If, as Sedgwick says, some of us “fail to desire,” there may well be, as Jack Halberstam’s work reminds us, a particularly queer pleasure in affirming the failure to be properly sexual (and the failure to produce recognizably disciplinary scholarship): “failure allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development with the goal of delivering us from unruly childhoods to orderly and predictable adulthoods. . . . [Failure] provides the opportunity to use these negative affects to poke holes in the toxic positivity of contemporary life” (Halberstam 2011, 3). The failure to be sexual or have a *sexual orientation* offers one modality of feeling a much wider field of erotics—a politics of touch—that sustains and envelops queer, asexual orientations to sexuality.

If asexuality is an orientation toward *sexuality* more than a *sexual orientation*, my hope is that connecting it to the biopolitics of humanism (and to Wynter’s Man/human distinction in particular) may allow asexuality to have a specific resonance with modes of queer, decolonial, feminist, and antiracist politics that are also oriented *elsewhere* than toward Man. This does not mean that asexuality is decolonial, antiracist, or feminist, at least not in any simple or univocal way, but it means that there is a political possibility here for solidarities, affiliations, and mutual struggle collated, as Weheliye would say, toward the abolition of Man. The concept of erotic biopolitics allows us to conceptualize and constellate specific, material conditions of worlding that intra-actively shape political orientations, projects, and speculations. This is a politics of affect in which what matters is how entities touch each other, and how those tactile encounters accumulate as orientations.

One crucial way to pose the politics of touch is to focus on the ways that lives are structured by adjacency, cohabitation, and companionship—in other words, by thinking through what anthropologists would call kinship systems or assemblages. Within dominant (and often directly colonialist and heteropatriarchal) kinship systems, virtually every relationship between any two people has some truck with sexuality. One can distinguish, to use the anthropological language for a moment, those who constitute the in-group who are barred, thanks to the incest taboo, from (licit) sexual contact. These are, in effect, highly codified positions that tend to be named according to branching trees of sexual contact: mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandmother, cousin, etc. On the other side of the ban, where Gayle Rubin (2011) places the compulsion to exogamy, are an array of possible sexual partners for everything from long-term pair-bonding (including in state- or church-sanctioned marriage contracts) to a few minutes of furtive and anonymous pleasure. There is no compulsion, of course, that anyone *must* find everyone outside of one’s kin sexually attractive—and here is where the often-crushing weight of Man comes to bear, shaping sexual desire along circuits plugged into racism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, classism, and

so on. But compulsory sexuality presents people with the always at least virtually present possibility that any encounter with someone who is not kin may be, on some level, a *sexual encounter*. Within compulsory sexuality, statist formations have sought to forcibly impose specific kinship structures on colonized peoples (Alexander 1997; Kauanui 2018) or have tried to forcibly deny access to them to enslaved persons and their descendants (Patterson 1982; Spillers 2003). States recognize only specific kin categories and relations: far from being *natural*, kinship systems as we know them are inseparable from heteropatriarchal, colonialist modes of biopolitics that shape our affective attachments to others, with (hetero)sexual relations constituting the primary (and often only) vector of assessing which relations are recognized.

But what if sexuality is not—or does not have to be—the only vector of *making kin* (Haraway 2016), at least for some of us, at least some of the time? Might this failure to be properly compelled into sexuality hold some interesting possibilities for rethinking what it means to be human, and the social formations that are intra-active with genres of performing the human? In other words, because asexual orientations are likely to be the most socially difficult and anxiety-producing in relation to kinship systems, there may be important ways that asexuality links up with experiments in queer kinship systems in humans and nonhuman animals (Roughgarden 2013; Weston 1991), and with kinship systems forged in the wake of coloniality, the transatlantic slave trade, diasporic migration, and other racialized violences of modernity (Eng 2010; Sharpe 2016; Spillers 2003; Stack 1974). Here again, there may be solidarities and affinities among different groups constructing human and more-than-human kin relations at a distance from Man. This could mean extending David Eng's call for "poststructuralist theories of kinship" (2010) toward what Julietta Singh might call "dehumanist" forms of making kin (2018), where the *de-* signals both a deconstruction of existing humanist (read: Man-centered) modalities of social relation, and the elaboration and proliferation of decolonial alternatives.

Asexual politics can and do sometimes take the form of demands for recognition, and the production of a lexicon that would situate it within the norms of the human (Man) as a sexual orientation (or a spectrum of sexual orientations). I have tried to be as generous as I can be with these moves, not least because I find myself using *asexual* precisely to be legible within my social relations, and because my hypothesis is that Marcher's response to his "neighbor" at the end of the story suggests a desire for the social recognition of a grievable relation not structured by sexuality. In fact, such a recognition-based, minoritizing politics may well be a way to handle the kinds of social violence that surround Marcher and Bartram's relationship. But it seems like asexual politics might be configured in very different ways precisely by moving away from humanist and statist modes of recognition and toward an affective biopolitics of touch. Erin Manning insists that "a politics that is a politics of touch evokes a displacement—where, often, the terrain from which I diverge seems much more familiar,

more comprehensible, more certain—a displacement that produces affinities, attractions, mirages, magnetisms and divergences, ruptures, fissures, and dissociations” (2007, 14).²⁵ This litany of possibilities that may (or may not) occur from within a specific erotic situation signals the unevenness that pervades material environments as they intra-actively shape subjects. As Mel Chen’s (2012) notion of the animacy scale and Kyla Schuller’s (2018) analysis of impressibility foreground, the politics of touch—or affect—cannot be rendered in flat, universal terms. Spaces *feel* differently to different bodies (precisely because of what Sara Ahmed calls the politics of orientation), and so erotic situations have to be analyzed as singularities that are highly asymmetrical with respect to historical, political, and cultural forces.²⁶ To use two obvious examples, the settler colonial spaces of the Americas, Australia, and Palestine orient settler, arrivant, and Indigenous persons differently (Byrd 2011), and the total environment of anti-Blackness that Christina Sharpe (2016) calls “the wake” registers very differently for people marked as white and Black. These histories adhere in what could be called, following Sedgwick and recalling Przybylo and Cooper’s use of this word, the *texture* of situations: “texture, in short, comprises an array of perceptual data that includes repetition, but whose degree of organization hovers just below the level of shape or structure” (Sedgwick 2003, 16). This erotic field is affective, and textural, and its politics shape perception as bodies are oriented in space.

Asexual biopolitics might be profoundly *antisexuality*, not in the sense of a puritanical or right-wing panic in the face of sexuality, but in the sense of seeking out alternative ways of being and becoming that exist at a remove from the kind of biopolitical discipline and control that Foucault argued attends *sexuality*. Focusing on the erotic biopolitics attunes us to how people find pleasures in their bodies, the bodies of others, and the messy friction among entities, and it lets us intersectionally analyze the unevenness of more-than-human situations, organized by coloniality, from which subjects emerge.

Nathan Snaza teaches English literature, gender studies, and educational foundations at the University of Richmond. He is the author of *Animate Literacies: Literature, Affect, and the Politics of Humanism* (Duke University Press, 2019), and his writing has also appeared in journals such as *Feminist Studies*, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, *Social Text*, *Cultural Critique*, *symploke*, *Angelaki*, and *Parallax*.

Notes

1. Ela Przybylo has theorized an “asexual erotics of failure,” drawing in part on Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), which shifts away from discourses of pride toward “pok[ing] holes in the promises of sex as it adheres to positivity and homonormative identity maintenance” (Przybylo 2019, 87). My use of *failure* here is also inspired

by Halberstam's claim that "under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (Halberstam, 3).

2. In *Asexual Erotics*, Przybylo's claim that asexuality is a sexual orientation is, at least in part, a legitimizing move, but then goes on: "Yet while this book takes for granted that asexuality is 'real' (an affordance it is routinely denied) and a valid identificatory position and orientation, it does not adhere to the constraints and parameters of contemporary asexual identification as they take form both in online articulations of asexuality and in media representations" (2019, 2).

3. Karen Barad writes that "the neologism 'intra-action' signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies. That is, in contrast to the usual 'interaction,' which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede the interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action" (2007, 33).

4. Brian Massumi's *Ontopower* (2015) is an extended study of how these biocultural capacities are captured by the state via assemblages that prime bodies' perceptual and affective systems to respond to shifting milieux in particular ways. His book *What Animals Teach Us About Politics* (2014) foregrounds the creative possibilities for outmaneuvering such ontopower, possibilities that adhere in the animal capacity for play.

5. It is perhaps worth noting here that most reproduction, even among living creatures, is not sexual.

6. The concept of the *assemblage* was first developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), and my use of it here is indebted to Jasbir Puar's claim that "the assemblage, as a series of dispersed but mutually implicated and messy networks, draws together enunciation and dissolution, causality and effect, organic and inorganic forces" (2007, 211). That is, assemblages are more-than-human configurations of matter and force that are dispersed throughout situations and that generate subjects in differential ways. Whereas Puar's work pivots away from intersectionality toward assemblage theory (a decision she elaborates in much greater detail elsewhere [Puar 2012], I would argue that the two conceptual/analytic approaches appertain to different scales: intersectional analysis (especially as developed within legal studies) offers nuanced ways for understanding the complexities of how subjects relate to policies, institutions, and systems, while assemblage theory foregrounds the more-than-human situations that precede and give rise to subjects.

7. See Matt Brim's *Poor Queer Studies* (2020) for an exceptional account of how differential access to institutional resources shapes academic encounters. His larger argument is that the dominant field imaginary in queer studies has been shaped by scholars working at elite, exceptionally well-funded universities (he uses the phrase "rich queer studies" to signal this). Although a full engagement with Brim's argument is beyond the scope of this article, what I'm calling *erotic biopolitics* is precisely about attuning to how differential material conditions shape subjects, collectivities, and dreams for new futures.

8. In *Making Out*, Kathryn Bond Stockton figures all reading as being penetrated by words as dildos, noting that "you could even call it asexual sex, if you desire. (No one lays a hand on you.)" (2019, 101).

9. My use of *shimmers* here is indebted to Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth's introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, "An Inventory of Shimmers" (2010).

10. Donna Haraway argues that “feminist objectivity is about limited vision and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting subject and object. In this way we might become answerable for what we learn how to see” (1991, 190).

11. This prevalence of the *archive* in queer theory specifically, but a certain kind of social thought generally, is quite diffuse. Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings* (2003) stands out as crucial here in that she foregrounds the “demand” for “an unusual archive” (7). That is, for many queer theorists, it is not just archives that contain traces of specifically queer identities, desires, acts, and affects, but part of the project of queer theory is to imagine *queer* archival practices, and queer manners of interpreting archives.

12. In *Unthinking Mastery*, Julietta Singh calls discomfort “a politically fertile affect” (2018, 152). Drawing on Sara Ahmed, Singh writes that “it is not so much that discomfort becomes ‘radically’ transformative by breaking away from norms completely but rather that discomfort shows us how to abide differently within these norms” (151). Lauren Berlant writes that “Sedgwick herself exemplified how all situational writing from specific historical moments . . . insisted on a slowed-down and amplifying attention” (2019, 1).

13. *Compulsory sexuality* is a term from radical feminist theory, and specifically a riff on Adrienne Rich’s enormously influential essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), which already sets the notion of *orientation* trembling. (The third page of the essay explicitly questions the notion of “innate orientation” [633].) For Rich, heterosexuality is an *institution*, one that disciplines, or *orients*, biocultural emergence. Seeing heterosexuality as an institution instead of a *natural* given is then a precondition for imagining lesbian existence in particular, but also a field of political experimentation that is considerably more universalizing: “a freeing-up of thinking, the exploring of new paths, the shattering of another great silence, new clarity in personal relationships” (Rich, 648). Becky Rosa, in “Anti-Monogamy,” an essay on radical feminist critiques of monogamy, extends Rich’s concept to claim that “women were not just forced into compulsory heterosexuality, but also into compulsory sexuality. Women are expected to be in, or want to be in, a sexual relationship. This pressure exists inside and outside of the lesbian community” (Rosa 1994, 110). For an extended account of *compulsory sexuality* and the politics of its use, see Kristina Gupta’s “Compulsory Sexuality” (2015).

14. See, for instance, “He hadn’t disturbed people with the queerness of their having to know a haunted man” (James 1998, 348), or “The rest of the world, of course, thought him queer” (350).

15. Ahmed’s *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* similarly focuses on emotion: “We need to remember the ‘press’ of an impression. It allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion with the very affect of one surface upon another, an affect that leaves its mark or trace” (2015, 6).

16. I discuss this material, erotic situation at length in *Animate Literacies* (Snaza 2019), especially in chapter 13 (124–33). I also want to note two books that devote sustained attention to the ways that specific environments shape particular literary and literacy events: Diana Fuss’s *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them* (2004), and *The Imagery of Interior Spaces*, edited by Dominique Bauer and Michael J. Kelly (2019).

17. Ahmed quotes Lorde: “A room of one’s own may be a necessity for writing prose, but so are reems of paper, a typewriter, and plenty of time” ([1978] 1984, 116). On the necessarily more-than-human field of erotics, see Stacy Alaimo’s, *Exposed* (2016):

"Pleasure, impossible to confine within dichotomies of nature and culture, body and mind, pulses through an imaginative materiality" (43).

18. John Carlos Rowe notes that "James's cosmopolitanism must be read in terms of America's geopolitical ambitions in the same period" (1998, 15–16). Rowe also notes "James's ambivalent representations of Jews and people of color, immigrants to the United States, and the role of other cultures in the future of both the United States and Great Britain" (xii). I would include within that last category Marcher's orientalist travels in section VI of the story, which immediately precede the graveyard scene (James 1998, 366–68).

19. An overview of these debates can be found in Anker and Felski's *Critique and Postcritique* (2017). Importantly, several of the "postcritical" readers whose work constitute the movement-defining statements are queer literary critics: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Stephen Best, and Heather Love.

20. Wynter has argued that "the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves" (2003, 26).

21. The dehumanization of asexual people does not always involve the same risks of homophobic violence that many LGTBQI people face. Erica Chu notes that "asexuals as a group are not perceived as being specifically targeted by institutionally oppressive forces," which means that "the level of camaraderies of LGBQs are willing to extend has thus far been fairly low" (2014, 83). But Eunjung Kim has argued that especially in cases where asexuality is linked with disability, "sexual experience is considered necessary for them to be recognized as human beings" (2017, 198). This leads to modes of "curative violence," because "disability and presumed asexuality are both pathologized, thereby creating the need for remedy" (16–17).

22. M. Remi Yergeau summarizes many of these terms in *Authoring Autism* (2018).

23. This would include the possibility of affirming all kinds of erotic relations and practices that are currently within the field captured by sexuality but which might be biopolitically enacted otherwise. In other words, the erotic may well return us to Foucault's famous speculative remark that "the rallying point for the counterattack and against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures" (1978, 157).

24. Christopher Castiglia, in "Hope for Critique?," proposes the idea of dispositions of reading in part by figuring reading as a matter of orientation: "Dispositions, as I use the term here, are neither inborn character traits nor simple moods of circumstances . . . , but a cultivated frame of mind, an orientation toward the text, less self-conscious than method and more sustained than mood. Dispositions are what make certain epistemologies feel right to us" (2017, 213). Between method and mood, an orientation is thus an affective attunement to the text.

25. The best critique of state recognition politics is Indigenous theorist Glen Sean Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014).

26. This claim could be expanded in relation to the substantial literature on queer temporalities, including Mark Rifkin's *Beyond Settler Time* (2017), Carla Freccero's claim that haunting is an "erotic experience" (2006), and Elizabeth Freeman's claim

that “affect and eroticism themselves may be queer insofar as they refuse to acquiesce always and in ordinary ways to industrial, commodity, or ‘modern’ time” (2010, 145).

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